



S P E E C H

OF

HON. D. A. STARKWEATHER, OF OHIO,

ON

THE OREGON QUESTION.

DELIVERED

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1846.

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THE OREGON QUESTION.

The House being in Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, on the Resolution authorizing the President to give notice to Great Britain of the abrogation of the convention of joint occupancy—

Mr. STARKWEATHER obtained the floor, and addressed the committee as follows:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: In entering on this discussion, I wish to state, before I approach the subject, (and this I speak more for the information of my constituents than that of the House,) that, on the Texas question, I have not voted, not because I wished to dodge the question, but because I was absent from the city when the question was taken, on important business, and thus lost the privilege of recording my vote. I may be allowed to premise this for the information of the people of my district, though it will not be without its bearing on the remarks I am about to submit to the committee.

I should not (said Mr. S.) have attempted to address the committee at this late hour, had I not thought I had discovered, in some quarters, a fixed determination to degrade this great national question to a mere sectional and western measure. When the debate opened, the gentleman from Alabama, [Mr. YANCEY,] and the gentleman from South Carolina, [Mr. RHETT,] followed by another from "Old Virginia," who "never tires" in sounding her own praises, charged expressly that this was a western measure. The gentleman from Alabama said: "I beg of our friends of the West 'that, if some of us of the South are disposed to put a curb on this hot impetuosity, we shall not be deemed their enemies on this great issue.'" Again, he says: "Are we prepared for this issue of arms? From the very West, which now seeks to

'involve the country in its vicissitudes and horrors, 'has come a long and continued opposition to any 'such increase of our gallant and glorious navy as 'the wants of the country, it seems to me, imperatively demand.'" Sir, I repeat, it has been charged that this is a western measure, and that western members are seeking to involve our beloved country in all the vicissitudes and horrors of war. Sir, had not the West, which adopted me as one of her sons, been thus assailed, I should not, perhaps, have attempted to speak on this occasion; but I could not consent to sit still and hear unmerited aspersions heaped upon the West, without saying one word in vindication of that country which adopted me as hers when a youth, clothed me when naked, and consoled me when disconsolate. The gentleman from Alabama [Mr. YANCEY] further said: "At this very time, too, when 'war's dread horrors are laughed at by young members of this House, full of courage, doubtless, but 'with no experience, even now when we are about 'to dare Old England to cross swords with us, serious opposition is made to passing a bill providing for the raising of a single regiment of riflemen." Here, sir, in this is contained the charge, that those who go for the notice are young and inexperienced men, ready and willing to plunge this country into an unprepared and disgraceful war. As this sentiment fell from the lips of the inexperienced—I ask pardon—the experienced gentleman from Alabama, [Mr. YANCEY,] I heard, or thought I heard, my young and inexperienced friend from Massachusetts, [Mr. ADAMS,] who is a friend of the measure, in the language of the great philosopher of poetry, inquire, "How much older art thou, young man, than thy years?"

This is a western measure! Does Oregon belong to the West? No, sir, it belongs to the whole

Union, and to the West only in common with her. It is true, sir, if war should grow out of this notice, (of which I have no fears,) the hardy sons of the West would, at the first bugle note of war, unyoke their horses from the plough in the half-turned furrow, and harness them for the shock of battle. Wherever glory was to be won, or deeds of valor to be achieved, whether on the plains of Oregon, in the frozen North, or the sunny South, there, sir, would they be found.

Let me not be misunderstood. I am a lover of peace. Strictly and emphatically am I a peace man. I can see all its beauties, and appreciate all its benefits. I well know that civilization, science, the arts, religion, and general social prosperity—all flourish under the reign of peace. Peace is the goddess I worship. I would purchase it at any price but the price of cowardly fear or national dishonor. These are too high a price to pay even for peace itself.

One year since, I was a private citizen, living in the midst of my constituents. We read with deep anxiety the debates on the Texas question, and watched with solicitude every step taken thereon. I, for one, was anxious, if the deed was to be done that it were done, and so were my constituents. A large majority were in favor of the annexation of Texas in some form, so that it could be constitutionally done, and without dishonor. The deed was done. The West went with the South, and the lone star now culminates with her sisters. Texas was admitted into this Union as a State, not reannexed. That argument is to me, like the tale of an idiot, signifying nothing. She was taken into this Union because she, like our revolutionary fathers, had won her liberty, and, being free, had a right to contract. I have said that Texas is now in this confederacy. The broad flag of this Union now floats over her, giving her an assurance of protection and peace.

Sir, Oregon and Texas were twin sisters, born at a birth; Oregon the elder, and for a while she did seem to outstrip her sister; but suddenly, at a single bound, Texas sprang ahead, and where now, let me ask, is Oregon? Left to all the dangers of an early and perilous orphanage. Sir, we have protected that which was not ours, and forsaken that which is. Why is this? I will not answer the question. I will leave it to others. But this I do know, that some gentlemen, who now seem to turn pale in contemplating the power of England, her warlike preparations, and her prowess, who now are clamorous against the giving of this notice, because England possibly may object, but one short year ago, with rash and fiery hand, were for plucking the golden fruit—Texas. Then was the hour. The golden pear was ripe, and that was the moment to gather it, or it would be lost forever.

England protested against the annexation of Texas, and Mexico set up her claim to it. War was anticipated with England then. The distinguished gentleman from South Carolina, [Mr. RHETT], who now informs us that before we can acquire possession of Oregon, "we must fight in every region of the world, wherever British commerce extends, British power is felt, and British strength is accumulated; that we must tear down the pillars which support the vast structure of the British empire—the most magnificent the world

'ever beheld;' then exclaimed, "the annexation of Texas would be a proclamation to England to 'come on, if she chose to go to war on that issue.'" (See *Congressional Appendix*, page 166.)

What, in one short year, hath caused a change in the spirit of these gentlemen's dreams? On what hath this British lion fed that he hath now grown so big? When Texas was to be annexed, we were taught to believe that he was but a mean cur, which a woman with a dagger of lath could whip back to his kennel. Gentlemen who then were as brave as Cæsar, are now ready to fawn, and cringe, and yield submissive homage to any who may please to demand it.

Why, sir, the whole argument in opposition to this measure has been addressed to the fears, and not the patriotism, of this House. When Texas was to be annexed to this Union, we heard nothing, from the gentlemen who now oppose this measure, of the horrors of war—nothing of delay for preparation—nothing of burning and sacked cities—nothing of inglorious defeat—nothing of the groans of the dying stricken down in battle—nothing of the crushed heart of the widow—nothing of the tears and suffering of the orphan. Then all was glorious victory. The area of freedom was to be extended, and we were to achieve an easy conquest over England, and Mexico too; but now, when we simply wish to carry out a treaty stipulation with England, we are solemnly admonished to pause—called on to practise a masterly inactivity—ay, sir, we are now told that the better part of valor is discretion, and urged to write that inglorious motto on our national standard. Will we do it? I trust not, until we at least inquire into the character of him who uttered it, and the occasion which gave birth to so cowardly a sentiment. Who was it, sir? That distinguished knight, Jack Falstaff, whose tavern-bill ran thus: "Sack, two gallons, 5s. 8d. Item: Anchovies, and sack after supper, 2s. 6d. Item: Bread, a half penny." He, sir, who called for a cup of sack to make his eyes look red, that it might be thought he had wept. He, sir, who exclaimed, "if sack and sugar be a crime, God help the wicked." The same heroic knight, who, with his own dagger, hacked up his sword like a handsaw, and swore "it was done in valorous conflict." He, sir, who swore, "if he was not at half-sword with a dozen men in buckram, and misbegotten rogues in Kendall green, for two hours together, then was he a bunch of radishes, and no two-legged creature." The same man, when Poin's his companion, exclaimed: "Pray heaven, Jack, you have not murdered some of them," replied: "That is past praying for. I have peppered two of them; two, I am sure, I have paid; two rogues in buckram suits. I tell thee what, Hal, if I tell thee a lie, spit in my face, call me horse. Thou knowest my old ward. Here I lay, and thus I bore my point, and took all of their seven points in my target, thus. Their points being broken, I followed me close, came in foot and hand, and with a thought, seven of the eleven I paid."

This, sir, is a short outline of the character of that lying braggart, who first uttered the sentiment, "The better part of valor is discretion," with which the gentleman from Alabama [Mr. YANCEY] seems to have fallen so deeply in love.

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Let us now, for a moment, inquire into the occasion and the circumstances under which that sentiment was uttered. It was on the battle field of Shrewsbury, where the gallant Prince Henry embraced the fiery Hotspur, and struck him down in battle; where the dreaded Douglass of the North crossed the track of this gallant Falstaff, who, without striking a blow in self-defence, a blow for his king, or his country, fell to the earth and counterfeited death; and there, sir, yes, there lay the most illustrious example of masterly inactivity ever recorded on the page of history. As the shock of battle passed by, he raised his cowardly carcass from the earth, and seeing Hotspur, the once dreaded and gallant leader of the war, stretched in death by his side, drew his sword and stabbed the body of the noble dead, exclaiming, "the better part of valor is discretion." Yes, sir, such was the man, and such the circumstances under which the sentiment was uttered. Sir, I am a plain, unlettered man, and bear with great humility the reproach cast upon me by the gentleman from Alabama, [Mr. YANCEY,] in his charge, "that the West has sent here her young men, full of courage, but without any experience at all." I will close my reply to this branch of the question, by adding, that it is owing entirely to my inexperience that I cannot, with him, appreciate the character of his Falstaff, or the beauty of his sentiments.

The gentleman from South Carolina tells us that this notice is a war measure, and that rumor says that it is a scheme for President-making. For my own part I can appeal to Him who knows the heart to witness that I am moved by no such considerations. I would not turn upon my heel this day to make any one man President over another. All I ask now, or shall ever ask hereafter, from my country, is to put a man at the head of this Government who shall carry out American doctrines, and act on American principles. If the gentleman means to allude to me in any such remark, he does me great injustice. Does he mean to say that I am ready to cover this land with blood for the mere petty, paltry object of advancing one man over another? If he means such a charge for me, I throw back the charge with indignation. It is possible that we may not comprehend this measure as clearly as do gentlemen from the South; but surely our hearts are not so utterly steeled to all humanity—so utterly dead to every just sentiment—so unmindful of the glory and happiness of our country—that we should be willing to cover her fair fields and her verdant plains with blood to advance the pretensions of General Scott, Governor Wright, Lewis Cass, John C. Calhoun, or any other individual, to the presidential chair. It was unjust in the gentleman to bring a charge like this against the West.

Perhaps in my present state of health, it would be doing injustice to myself to urge this discussion very far. During most of the day I have been confined to my room, and when I entered this Hall I had just risen from my bed.

But I said that I felt it an imperative duty to say a few words here in favor of the West.

And now let me turn for a moment to the gentleman from Virginia—to the "lone star" of the universal Dominion. He says, in speaking of the patriotic pioneers who have gone to Oregon, "Why

is it, that, with instinctive aversion, they retire before the advance of civilization, preferring the wild excitement and rugged discomforts of the wilderness to the repose, the security, and refinements of social and cultivated life? They manifest their attachment by disregarding the influences that bind ordinary men to the places of their nativity—by snapping recklessly the ties of blood and kindred. Abandoning the hearths and altars of their childhood, they toil through a vast and cheerless wilderness, where savage man and savage beast meet them at every turn, through scenes where danger lurks in every path, and death is whispered in every breeze." Again, he says: "It is not the policy of our Government to be running over the world looking after citizens, whose allegiance is only manifested by acts of expatriation." Sir, we are told that the hardy pioneers of the West have expatriated themselves by going to Oregon.

Sir, some fifty years ago, the Alleghany mountains were to the rich valley of the Mississippi, what the Rocky mountains now are to the fertile plains of Oregon. The same obstacles were then presented by the one that now obstruct the other. Had the gentleman from Virginia [Mr. PENDLETON] met the adventurous pioneer who first climbed the rugged heights of the Alleghanies, he would, I presume, have addressed him thus: "Hold! You are leaving eastern civilization. Come back to the refinements of eastern Virginia; wear your hair long like a woman; raise an imperial and the moustache; perfume yourself with *Eau de Cologne*, and the *Bouquet de Caroline*; attend the school of a French dancing-master, that you may learn to caper nimbly in a lady's chamber, to the lascivious pleasing of a lute." Cross not yon rugged height; beyond, danger lurks in every path, and death is whispered in every breeze." I hear, or think I hear, the sturdy pioneer, thus arrested and thus invoked, reply, "I had rather have one snuff of yon pure mountain air than all the perfumery of your shops. I would rather hear one note of yon mountain harp, swept by the winds of heaven, and touched by the hand of nature, than all the music of your masters. You tell me there is danger in every path. That of itself would lure me on. Danger, I court it." Finding that this hardy woodsman could not be turned back to Virginia civilization by such considerations, he is urged still further, and informed that he expatriates himself—is unworthy the name of an American citizen; that he voluntarily and recklessly is snapping the ties of blood and kindred, by forsaking the altars of his childhood. At this, in sorrow he exclaims, "I expatriated! I unworthy the name of an American citizen! I recklessly snapping the ties of kindred! I, who before these arms had fifteen years pith, took up arms for my country, and fought on every battle-field of the Revolution! I, who saw my own patriotic sire, in a successful charge, stricken down by my side, whose last and only word was, 'Onward, my son, your country needs you!'" 'Twas then the ties of kindred and of blood were snapped." Are such men as these to be denied the privilege of citizenship because they can't dance with eastern grace? Sir, had it not been for our Boones, our Poes, and men like these, the places where now stand our western cities, our temples of worship, and halls of

science, would be inhabited by savage man or savage beast. The joyous song of plenty would not now rise daily from the hearts of our happy millions. I am replying more to the arguments urged here against the West, than arguing our title to the territory. It is now too late to begin an argument on the question of our title. That seems to be admitted on all hands, at least by most of the gentlemen who are opposed to giving the notice at this time.

The gentleman from Virginia, [Mr. BEDINGER,] apparently not content with the praises that have been urged in favor of British valor and British power, dragged down the American Eagle—the noble emblem of our country's freedom—from its high flight, and made it to stop in its free course, that a rainless cloud might pass by. It is true, sir, the gentleman made his bird at first to soar gracefully and boldly upwards, as though to snatch in its beak the lightnings of Heaven; but, as it approached even an imaginary danger—"a rainless cloud"—like a coward, it stooped to its perch to let it sweep by. Sir, I, too, am familiar with the habits of the eagle, and well remember, on the approach of one of those maddening tempests that sometimes seem to be struggling for mastery over both sea and land—one which carries before it consternation and terror, and leaves in its track destruction and death—one that now sweeps the vale below, and now seizes by the top the mountain pine, and dashes it to the earth, and anon lashes old ocean to a fury. At the approach of such a tempest, I beheld one of these noble birds, with its wings folded in peace, watching the coming storm, and, as it felt the first rockings of the tempest, it sprang aloft, and for a moment lay suspended in mid heaven, as though to discover where the tempest most raged; then, dashing onward, it approached nearer and yet nearer the coming storm, until at last it was lost in its darkness and confusion. I could but exclaim, Noble bird! even if thou fallest, stricken down by the bolts of Heaven, 'twas bravely done. For a moment to learn its fate, I saw it gracefully emerging from the cloud into the broad sunlight of Heaven, far above the raging tempest below. Then shaking the rain-drops from its triumphant wing, it cut its course westward to its seat of empire. That, sir, that, was an American eagle, and no mousing and cowardly owl, that stoops to its perch because a rainless cloud lay in its free course.

Sir, we are admonished by gentlemen, that if this notice be given, we shall lose California. Lose California! When, sir, was it ours? Never, sir, never; and how are we to lose that which is not, and never was, ours? Sir, I have no objection to the purchase of California; and here let me say, that I confidently believe that this Republic, with her free institutions and prosperity, standing as an example to the world, free and enlightened governments are to and will, extend from one country to another, until at last every man will be left free to speak, free to act, and free to think. But, sir, for the chance of purchasing California from a weak and distracted nation, I am unwilling to yield territory that is ours, simply because a proud and arrogant nation

demands it. We are told by gentlemen who admit Oregon to be ours, that we must not give this notice, because England is in a state of preparation for war; that she is stronger this day than she was when she set her proud foot upon the neck of the very genius of war—Napoleon; that she belts the earth with her military posts and colonial possessions; that the sun never rises but it awakens an English soldier to arms; that it never sets but upon British dominions. Sir, this is an argument, if true, addressed solely to the fears of this House and this nation; but I am one of those who do not believe England is so powerful, and this Government so weak, as represented by gentlemen. On the one hand, we have at least four millions out of our twenty millions of inhabitants able to bear arms in defence of our country's honor, and in defence of American soil—with all the munitions and sinews of war at our control—with a country producing all the necessities of life. On the other hand, England, with a population of about four millions greater than ours, many of whom are engaged in their mines, and have never seen the sweet rays of Heaven's sun, another large proportion of her subjects are confined within the walls of factories, with sinews worn out by fatigue and shrunk by starvation. And who of us is there who does not know that there are now eight millions of hearts of the *Green Emerald* panting for liberty, and eager for a conflict? Sir, who is there of us that does not know that some of the colonial possessions of England rather weaken her in war than give her strength? I repeat, sir, in my opinion, England is not as powerful as represented. But if she is, I would rather, as an American citizen, proud of my country, enter into a just war with England than set a cowardly foot on a weak and powerless nation. Nay, more, sir; I would rather yield Oregon to the imperious demands of England than be guilty of stealing it by masterly inactivity. If we are afraid to defend our territory, let us say so to the world, and give it up with as much grace as possible, and forget the inglorious deed.

Let me now for a moment revert to the proposition before the committee. It is the giving of notice to terminate the convention existing between this Government and England. The express treaty stipulation is, that either nation may, at any time, give such notice. Suppose we give the notice and England declares war, setting forth in her declaration that the United States have dared to execute an express treaty stipulation. This is all she could in truth say, and this embodies the entire proposition. Do you not see in such an event the civilized world would be against England and hold her responsible for the result? Sir, believing as I do that our title to Oregon is perfect—feeling it to be right that we should vindicate our title to it, and believing no nation should voluntarily surrender jurisdiction to her territory, and believing that further delay involves the question in more difficulties—I shall cast my vote for the notice, and leave the issue with Him who holds the destinies of nations in his hands.

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